



The Theory and Practice of International Social Work Is Affected by a History of Colonialism

What is this research about?

The field of international social work and development came out of a history of colonialism and imperialism. This history involved countries that now make up the global North and South. Because the global North has dominated the field, international social work is largely based on a Western view of the world. As a result, the practice of international social work is unidirectional. That is, it mainly involves people from the global North going to work in the global South. This trend affects how North American students look at global issues in their studies.

What did the researcher do?

The researcher used three ways to look at international social work. They were:

1. post colonial theory
2. critical spatial theory
3. critical race theory

The researcher used her experiences teaching an international studies class. She picked out situations where there were tensions between social work theory and the students' identity. The researcher aimed to have her students look beyond the common practices of international social work.

What you need to know:

International social work is taught under colonial terms. As a result, there is an unequal relationship between the global North and the global South when collaborating on social work projects. This also affects the way people learn about international social work. Since many students come from countries outside the global North, they challenge a Western world view on international social work issues.

What did the researcher find?

The researcher found that each of the theories touched on some of the drawbacks in international social work. She touched on ways that each theoretical approach may be used by social work students to critically engage the curriculum today.

The researcher found that post colonial theory can allow students to see how their current experiences are shaped by colonialism. Knowing this, students would be able to challenge the power behind their roles as social workers. They would also learn about social work issues with a global world view. The researcher argued that this makes post colonial theory important to use, given the diversity of students.

The researcher argued that critical space theory would have allowed social work classes to think about

where they are physically located. Since they were in the global North, they experienced more safety and privileges than the global South. Also, critical space theory would let students see both their privileges and disadvantages from living in the global North.

The researcher argued that critical race theory made international social work more relevant. It did so by allowing different views on case studies and on global issues. Students would be able to challenge bias on these subjects. They could also debate on whose voices are heard and unheard in international social work.

How can you use this research?

This research can be used to improve work by international groups that involve the global North and South. This would include groups that deal with international social work, development projects and human rights.

Schools and training centers may also find this research useful. Educators and policymakers in the education field may use this research to discuss ways to change current curriculum and course content. These changes would be very helpful to global studies classes. This would also make learning materials more interesting and unbiased.

About the Researcher

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